



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



ABERDEEN'S OLD CRONIES VISIT STATE VETERANS HOME

The annual motorcycle enthusiast group, Old Cronies, from the Aberdeen area visited the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home last Saturday.

Old Cronies President Brett Schaible presented MJFSVH Superintendent Brad Richardson with a generous cash gift to be used in support of the Veterans Home resident activities.

The flag in the picture below was built by Dave Lenling of Aberdeen and donated to the Home by the Clark County Riders Motorcycle Club in collaboration with the Old Cronies Motorcycle Enthusiasts. The Old Cronies were generous to deliver the flag and present it to the Home on their annual trip.

"On behalf of the residents and staff at the MJFSVH, we would very much like to thank Dave Lenling, the Clark County Riders MC and the Old Cronies ME, for their continued gifts and generosity to our heroes," said Richardson. "We appreciate their continued support."



L to R: Matt Spencer and Brett Schaible (Old Cronies) and MJFSVH Superintendent Brad Richardson.

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POW/MIA RECOGNITION DAY

At the request of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, Gov. Kristi Noem has proclaimed Friday, Sept. 17, 2021, as “POW/MIA Recognition Day,” calling on all South Dakotans to honor those men and women who fought bravely for our freedoms.

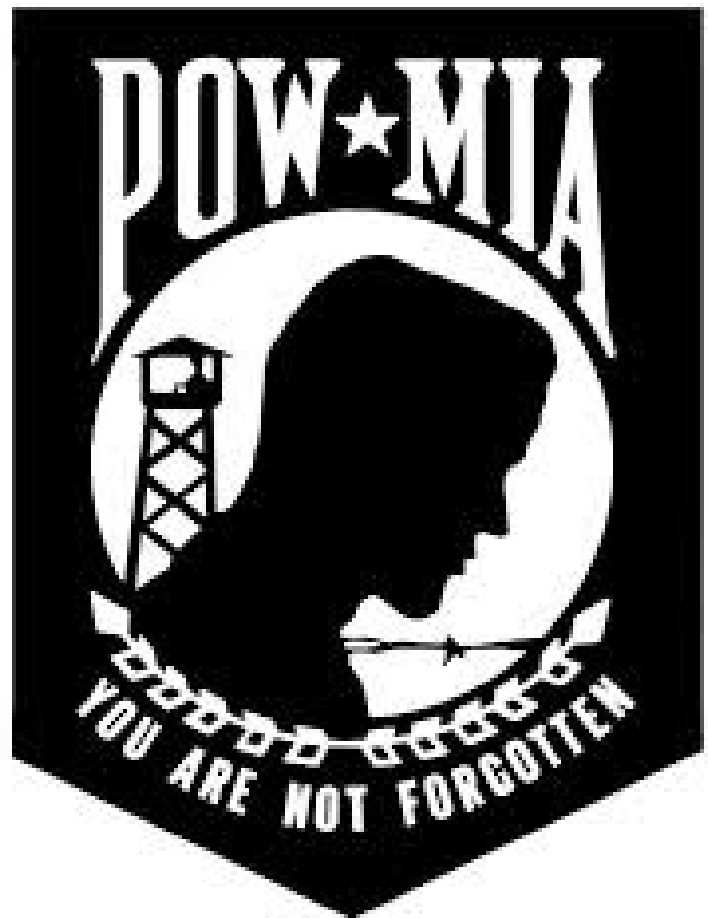
“While we are grateful to all of those who have served our nation, this day is designated to remember and recognize the sacrifices endured by those members of the Armed Forces of the United States who were held as prisoners of war or remain missing in action,” said Greg Whitlock, secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs.

Whitlock encourages all South Dakotans to set aside time Sept. 17th to honor the POW/MIA’s who fought to protect our freedoms and lost theirs, as well as remember those engaged in today’s struggle to guard our way of life for future generations.

“How appropriate it is for POW/MIA Recognition Day to be the same day as Constitutional Day, affording us the opportunity to demonstrate our love for this great country and the freedoms our founding fathers secured for us,” said Whitlock.

“In their service to our country, former prisoners of war and those missing in action have sacrificed mightily to maintain the promise of liberty that we hold dear,” said Whitlock. “POW/MIA Day affords all of us a great opportunity to reaffirm our vow to never forget the courage of our nation’s staunchest defenders – our POWs and MIAs. We owe them and their families our gratitude.”

The state of South Dakota continues to support efforts to account for every servicemember classified as Missing in Action.



VA ANNUAL REPORT SHOWS DECREASE IN VETERAN SUICIDES

New data included in the United States Department of Veterans Affairs [2021 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report](#) notably shows a decrease from 2018 to 2019 in the total number of veteran suicide deaths, and a decrease in the rate of veteran suicides per 100,000.

This drop is noteworthy when compared to the generally rising rates observed in earlier years. This latest report provides the most comprehensive data to date regarding suicide among U.S. Veterans from 2001-2019.

Key findings include:

- In 2019, there were 6,261 veteran suicide deaths, 399 fewer than in 2018.
- In 2019, the veteran suicide rate was 31.6 per 100,000, substantially higher than the rate among non-veteran U.S. adults (16.8 per 100,000).
- Adjusting for age-and-sex-differences, the suicide rate among veterans in 2019 was 52.3% higher than for non-veteran U.S. adults. The suicide rate difference between veterans and the non-veteran U.S. population was highest in 2017 at 66.3%.
- From 2018 to 2019, there was a 7.2% overall decrease in the age-and-sex-adjusted veteran suicide mortality rate in 2019, while among non-veteran U.S. adults, the adjusted suicide mortality rate fell by 1.8%.
- The age-adjusted suicide rate for male veterans decreased 3.8% in 2019 from 2018 while the age-adjusted suicide rate for female veterans decreased 14.9% in 2019 from 2018.
- Firearms were more often involved in veteran suicides in 2019 than in 2018 (among veteran men who died from suicide: 69.6% in 2018, 70.2% in 2019; among veteran women who died from suicide: 41.1% in 2018, 49.8% in 2019).

“Suicide prevention remains a top priority for the VA, with the most significant amount of resources ever appropriated and apportioned to VA suicide prevention,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “Suicide is preventable, and everyone has a role to play in saving lives. The VA continues to implement its 10-year strategy — as outlined in the 2018 [National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide](#) — to end veteran suicide through a [public health approach](#) combining both community-based and clinically-based strategies across prevention, intervention, and postvention areas of focus.”

To date, the VA has not observed increases in VHA documented suicide-related indicators during the COVID-19 pandemic. The VA will examine suicide mortality when national death certificate data becomes available.

For additional veteran suicide mortality data, see the report’s [accompanying state data sheets](#).

VA continues to implement its 10-year vision specifically through the Department’s strategic plan focused on efforts such as the Suicide Prevention 2.0 initiative; Suicide Prevention Now initiative; the President’s Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS); 988, and Veterans Crisis Line expansion.

VA ENHANCES GERIATRIC EMERGENCY CARE FOR OLDER VETERANS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs launched a [Geriatric Emergency Department initiative](#) within all of the VA's 18 Veterans Integrated Service Networks through a standardized, comprehensive care model, becoming the nation's largest integrated health network with specialized geriatric emergency care.

This initiative equips VA emergency departments with the ability to treat older veterans with complex conditions, catch unmet care needs, and develop teamwork strategies throughout the VA to better coordinate emergency departments and follow-up care.

The VA has partnered with the [American College of Emergency Physicians](#), [The John A. Hartford Foundation](#) and the [West Health Institute](#) to ensure elderly veterans continue to be afforded the best possible emergency care and person-centered health services.

The evidence-based approach to caring for older adults includes screenings to identify seniors at risk for cognitive impairment, delirium, fall risk, functional decline, and caregiver burden.

"Nearly half of the nation's 19.5 million veterans are over 65 years old and account for more than 45% of ED visits at VA hospitals— more than double the rate for seniors nationwide," said VA Acting Under Secretary for Health Steven L. Lieberman, M.D. "Our goal is to lower this number by ensuring the VA's elderly population receives age-friendly emergency care, while improving care coordination in communities across the nation."

The VA continues to promote and augment transitions of care through an interdisciplinary team approach from various services throughout facilities. This is achieved through connecting with social work and VA home/community resources, geriatric education for emergency department staff, and supporting geriatric veterans in the community to prevent avoidable admissions.

The partnership aims to establish 70 VA emergency departments as geriatric EDs eligible for accreditation in alignment with [ACEP's GED Accreditation](#) by December 2022.

Accreditation includes [three levels](#) that each have specific education criteria for clinicians and nurses, creating EDs that are more expertly equipped to treat older veterans with complex conditions and social needs through interdisciplinary service coordination across a hospital.

Accredited emergency departments have proven to lower costs, reduce the rate of unnecessary hospital admissions, and prevent the risk of inpatient complications. Best practices and lessons learned from this collaboration will be shared with EDs outside the VA. ACEP has accredited more than 200 emergency departments since the program's inception in 2018.

REACH OUT CAMPAIGN HIGHLIGHTS SERVICES FOR VETERANS DURING SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH

In conjunction with Suicide Prevention Month this September, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs is launching [Reach Out](#), a new campaign that raises awareness of its mental health resources available for veterans.

Timely evidence-based [suicide prevention public service announcements on firearm safe storage](#) have been released as the 20th anniversary of 9/11 approaches and the recent events in Afghanistan spark an array of emotions along with other stressors.

Reach Out emphasizes the importance of not waiting for a crisis to happen by acting now to help prevent veteran suicide later. In addition to reaching out other critical actions that can save a life are hearing a veteran's story, being prepared, finding resources, and spreading the word.

The messaging ensures veterans, their families, friends, and caregivers know they are not alone, and it only takes a moment to reach out and ask for help. The VA's Suicide Prevention Month campaign encourages veterans who might be going through a challenging time in their lives to reach out for support.

"Transitioning from military service, changing jobs, ending a relationship, and even raising kids can be overwhelming at times, and while everyone goes through ups and downs, sometimes veterans' experiences can intensify these situations," said VA Acting Under Secretary for Health, Steven L. Lieberman, M.D. "Veterans don't have to go through the challenges of life alone; VA and community organizations can help by providing resources before a crisis develops and assistance for veterans in crisis."

Take Action: 5 Things You Can Do Now



REACH OUT



HEAR VETERAN
STORIES



BE PREPARED



FIND RESOURCES



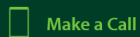
SPREAD THE
WORD

Don't wait for a crisis. Take a moment today to reach out. You can act now to help prevent Veteran suicide later.

Ways to Reach Out

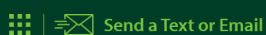


If you're a Veteran needing support



Make a Call

I feel like I should be strong enough to handle anything. But life has been rough lately and I need help.
Life has been piling up. Too many bad things happening at once. I want to get help now.

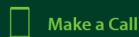


Send a Text or Email

I feel really alone right now. Can I call you to talk?
Even though I've been out for a while, I still can't get some things out of my mind. Can we meet up and talk?

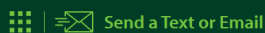


If you want to show a Veteran that you care



Make a Call

I'm just calling to catch up. How are you?
I know things have been rough for you lately. Tell me what's been going on. I want to listen and help.



Send a Text or Email

How is everything going? I'm here for you if you want to talk. I can help you find support if you need it.
I heard you're going through a tough time. You don't have to go through it alone—I'm here.

(continued)

REACH OUT (CONTINUED)

There are many ways to reach out to friends, family, and VA:

- Calling or texting a friend or fellow veteran to talk about what they're going through.
- Tapping into VA tools to get help when going through life's challenges.
- [Make the Connection](#), where more than 600 veterans and family members share their stories of strength and recovery.
- [MyVA411](#), where veterans, their families and caregivers can call 1-800-MyVA411 (800-698-2411) to easily access information on VA benefits and services.
- [VA Resource Locator](#), where veterans and families can find VA resources at the national and local level.
- VA also has resources to help Veterans transitioning from the military or going through a difficult time in life.
- [VA Solid Start](#) connects veterans with qualified representatives who call three times during a veteran's first year of separation to walk through benefits available.
- The [Self-Check Assessment](#) is a confidential anonymous risk assessment Veterans can use to help them understand if and how stress and depression are affecting them.
- Veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness can get free confidential support through the [National Call Center for Homeless Veterans](#), where trained counselors are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Veterans do not have to be registered with the VA or enrolled in VA health care to contact the center.



Veterans and loved ones can also find additional external resources on the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Behavioral Health Treatment Services](#) tool. It is confidential and anonymous and allows users to search by ZIP code for local treatment facilities that focus on substance use/addiction and/or mental health issues.



For more information and resources, visit <http://www.reach.gov/spm>.

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, contact the [Veterans Crisis Line](#) to receive free confidential support and crisis intervention available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Call **1-800-273-8255** and **Press 1**, text to **838255**, or chat online [at?VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](https://www.reach.gov/spm).

US ARMY SOLDIERS TRAIN FOR DEPLOYMENT AT SDNG SCHOOLHOUSE

Soldiers with the U.S. Army's 4th Battalion, 4th Security Forces Assistance Brigade received field artillery training from South Dakota Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 196th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) in Sioux Falls, Aug. 16-31.

Eight soldiers from the Fort Carson, Colorado-based Bravo Battery, 4-4th SFAB attended a Combined Duties Training Course to receive instruction on the U.S. Army's Multiple Launch Rocket System and High Mobility Artillery Rocket System to prepare for their upcoming deployment to Europe.

The 4-4th SFAB is a specialized field artillery team which conducts training, advising, assisting, enabling, and accompanying operations with allied and partner nations.

"We came upon a mission recently to work in EUCOM (European Command) and one of their main focuses is the Multiple Launch Rocket Systems," said 1st Sgt. Bradley Beavers, Bravo Battery first sergeant. "We realized we had a capability gap in our unit, as our unit is a majority cannoneers, and have limited experience with the MLRS."

The 4th SFAB was directed to the 196th RTI to complete training to bridge the capabilities gap that they had identified.

"We made a call and we were pointed in the direction of the 196th. They were hand selected by the National Guard as the premier training unit for MLRS," said Beavers. "We called them and they were ready to accommodate our unit and create a program of instruction for us...which turned into a great training event."

The course covered all aspects of the MLRS and HIMARS systems, from the basic, entry-level duties to the more advanced duties.

"We've been able to run through skill-level one tasks (the duty of the gunner and the driver), skill-level two and three tasks (the duties of the section chief) and skill-level four tasks (the duties of the platoon sergeant)," said Maj. Joshua Howard, Bravo Battery, 4-4th SFAB commander. "None of us have done any of this before, and I would assess that we are trained more than enough now to go and perform this mission."

Learning the duties at all levels of a HIMAR unit was very important to Bravo Battery leadership. They made the commitment to get the best training possible before deploying.



(continued)

TRAINING AT SDNG SCHOOLHOUSE (CONTINUED)

“Without this training we would be unable to advise the Romanians. We would have no experience and have no knowledge on the HIMARs,” said Howard. “You can’t advise somebody on something that you don’t have any knowledge or experience on.”

The training was invaluable to members of Bravo Battery. They were able to cover multiple topics, even some that were not on the schedule.

“The instructors here at the RTI were really good at gauging where we were at in the training,” said Beavers. “They gave us some great opportunities to go as far as we wanted to go during the training, because of that we were able to learn more throughout the training than we expected.”

The course allowed the team to expand their knowledge and understand the difference between the different types of artillery units.

“The training has been going very well. I have learned a lot more than I expected,” said Staff Sgt. Anthony Letts, Bravo Battery team leader. “I realize the difference in the way we fight with cannons and rockets, and I’m going to try to mix it all up to complete the mission.”

The training that the 196th provided for Bravo Battery went above and beyond what anybody expected when creating and organizing the training.



“This event has exceeded expectations 10 times over,” said Beavers. “I was an instructor at the Fort Sill NCO Academy for three years, and I will tell you this is one of the best group of instructors that I have ever seen. Their knowledge has been amazing, the training event that they put on for us has been amazing and speaking for my unit we appreciate everything these guys have done for us.”





GALLANTLY FORWARD
2021 GALA

SGT Derr battled Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) following his combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. We honor Colton by helping his fellow veterans.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

- Sep 10—VABHHCS Veterans Stand Down—The Monument's Rushmore (Halls C & D)—444 Mt. Rushmore Road—Rapid City—1:00 pm—5:00 pm (MT)
- Sep 10—VABHHCS We Remember 9/11 20th Commemoration—The Monument's Rushmore (Halls C & D)—444 Mt. Rushmore Road—Rapid City—5:00 pm (MT)
- Sep 10—VABHHCS Veterans Recovery Concert—The Monument's Rushmore (Halls C & D)—444 Mt. Rushmore Road—Rapid City—6:30 pm (MT)
- Sep 11—Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—1LT Herbert Lyman and T/SGT James Lyman—Thunder Hawk American Legion Post—Thunder Hawk—10:00 am (MT)
- Sep 11—Patriot Day Celebration—420 Villa Drive—Box Elder—2:30 pm (MT)
- Sep 18—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 7
- Sep 18—Midwest Honor Flight Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center Arena—9:15 pm (CT)
Doors Open at 7:30 pm (CT)
- Sep 22-23—DAV and Auxiliary 14th District Fall Conference—DAV Headquarters—1519 W. 51st Street—Sioux Falls
- Sep 24—Veterans Stand Down—SD Military Heritage Alliance (1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—9:00 am—noon (CT)
- Sep 30—Folds of Honor Legacy Golf Tournament—Red Rock Golf Course—Rapid City



UPCOMING EVENTS (CONTINUED)

Oct 8—Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—CPT Elmer Rusch—Brookings—11:00 am (CT)
 Oct 9—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 8
 Oct 9—Midwest Honor Flight Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center Arena—8:45 pm (CT)
 Doors Open at 7:00 pm (CT)
 Oct 9—BHSU Hero Appreciation Game—Lyle Hare Stadium—Spearfish—1:00 pm (MT)
 Oct 11—State Offices Closed
 Oct 11—Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—SGT William Christensen—American Legion Post 194 (221 W. Main Street)—Parkston—1:00 pm (CT)
 Oct 16—Gallantly Forward 2021 Gala—The Monument—Lacroix Hall—Rapid City—5:00 pm (MT)
 Oct 20—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—SD Military Heritage Alliance Building (1600 W. Russell)—Sioux Falls—9:00 am (CT)
 Oct 23—Midwest Honor Flight Hangar Dance at the South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance (1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls
 Nov 11—State Offices Closed
 Nov 11—Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—SSG Gregory Wagner—Hanson High School (600 Juniper Street)—Alexandria—1:00 pm (CT)
 Nov 13—Northern Hills Veterans Appreciation Fair—Sturgis Community Center (1401 Lazelle Street)—12:00—3:00 pm (MT)
 Nov 25-26—State Offices Closed
 Dec 7—Governor's Budget Address
 Dec 18—Wreaths Across America—South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)
 Dec 24—State Offices Closed
 Dec 31—State Offices Closed

2022

Jan 10—POW/MIA Chair of Honor Dedication—State Capitol—2:00 pm (CT)
 Jan 11—Governor's State of the State Address
 Jun 12—Midwest Honor Flight Annual Honor Ride
 Jul 18-23—National Veterans Golden Age Games—Sioux Falls



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